

# Vision 2013



South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness  
Strategic Plan – Adopted December 10, 2009

## Introduction

South Carolina's long-term prosperity lies firmly in the hands of its children. Yet many of the state's youngest citizens spend their formative years exposed to developmental and familial risk factors that stack the odds against both their academic and lifelong success.

Consider these facts:

- Nearly **1 in 4** South Carolina children are **born to mothers with less than a high school diploma**
- Roughly **1 in 10** has a family income level so low as to equate to **half of the federal poverty definition (no more than \$3,500 per person annually)**
- **1 in 5** is **eligible for free school lunches** or other supplemental nutrition assistance
- **1 in 10** S.C. children is **born at a weight of 5.5 lbs. or less**, and
- Roughly **1 in 20** is born to a **mother less than 18 years of age**.

Recent South Carolina data suggests that at least **1 in every 3 of the children described above will score at the lowest level of the state's standardized accountability test - or have been retained in a grade level - by the time they reach 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.**

With these sobering statistics in hand, the South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees began its work on Vision 2013, the agency's strategic plan, in early 2008. Collecting data and stakeholder feedback over an 18 month period, the Board has developed a powerful vision statement designed to guide the agency's ongoing work:

**Vision 2013: Connect South Carolina's high-risk children to coordinated, individualized interventions designed to improve their educational and developmental trajectories.**

This document is designed to familiarize the reader with both the Board's Vision 2013 recommendations and the processes through which they came to be determined - beginning with an introduction to the First Steps initiative itself.

## **South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness**

Created by law in 1999, First Steps was designed to fulfill an array of responsibilities on behalf of the state's families and children. Amongst its most critical responsibilities, the initiative is designed to:

- **Ensure the availability of high-quality early childhood programming (59-152-110)** - Through its network of 46 local Partnership Boards, the First Steps initiative is designed to offer, expand, extend - or improve the quality of - the state's readiness-focused early education and parenting/family support offerings.
- **Coordinate public and private resources (9-152-20)** - First Steps serves as an inter-agency venue - at both the state and local levels - through which to deliberately coordinate public and private resources to the benefit of the state's children, families and taxpayers.
- **Advance the state's child-focused public policy efforts (63-11-1730)** - Amongst the responsibilities assigned by law to the First Steps Board of Trustees is to "assess and develop recommendations for ensuring coordination and collaboration among service providers at both the

state and county level, for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs and funding and other programs and funding sources, as allowable, as necessary to carry out the First Steps to School Readiness initiative, including additional fiscal strategies, redeployment of state resources, and development of new programs.”



In addition to the responsibilities established within the initiative’s original enabling legislation, First Steps has - through a variety of legal means - added new responsibilities since its inception a decade ago.

- **IDEA Part C (BabyNet)** - On September 19, 2009 Governor Mark Sanford issued an executive order naming First Steps the state’s lead agency designate under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C. The BabyNet program, funded through a combination of federal and state resources - provides individualized, early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities for the express purpose of preparing them for educational success.
- **The Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)** - Created by legislative proviso in the wake of Circuit Court Judge Thomas W. Cooper’s ruling in Abbeville County School District et. al. vs. South Carolina (the state’s long-standing school equity funding lawsuit), the S.C. Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) provides high-quality pre-kindergarten to eligible four-year-olds within the litigant school districts. In partnership with the SC Department of Education - which oversees the program’s implementation within school district settings - First Steps is currently in the midst of its fourth year of CDEPP implementation within private, Head Start and faith-based settings.
- **S.C. Early Childhood Advisory Council** - Pursuant to the federal Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, Governor Sanford recently named the First Steps Board of Trustees as the state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council. This designation, which largely mirrors the Board’s existing policy-level responsibilities

under SC Section 63-11-1730 will further engage the agency in inter-agency strategic planning for the purpose of developing a seamless early childhood system within South Carolina.

## **The Vision Process**

The First Steps Board of Trustees launched the Vision 2013 strategic planning process with the adoption (June 2008) of five broad goals designed to improve the school readiness of SC children:

- GOAL 1:** Optimize early childhood investments in SC;
- GOAL 2:** Strengthen outcomes-based accountability;
- GOAL 3:** Enhance collaboration across public and private sectors;
- GOAL 4:** Support community-based planning and capacity-building; and
- GOAL 5:** Expand research-based practices and validate the efficacy of innovative approaches.

In order to ensure the ongoing incorporation of local voices and key stakeholder perspectives, the Board developed an iterative process, designed to cycle preliminary findings through multiple feedback loops using a three-pronged data collection strategy.

The Board's three primary data collection methods were:

1. Regional Early Childhood Summit Meetings
2. A Review of First Steps' Programmatic Offerings
3. A Review of First Steps' State-Level Policies/Parameters

Brief descriptions of these three major process strands are included below. For more detailed information, see the supplemental Vision materials posted on the First Steps website at <http://www.scfirststeps.org/vision2013.html>



## **Regional Early Childhood Summits**

(BOT Co-Chairs: Kristin Hook and Reese Yandle)

Vision 2013 launched formally during the summer of 2008, as the agency hosted seven regional early childhood summit meetings. The meetings, made possible in part by a grant from The National Governors' Association, were externally facilitated by The Lee Institute of Charlotte, NC. County-level delegations of 8-15 stakeholders, including First Steps, school districts, Head Start and local childcare providers came together to share local successes and delve deeply into community-level readiness data.



All told, the voices of more than 800 stakeholders were captured as each community delegate was offered the opportunity to reflect upon community gaps and assets, identify pressing needs and offer direct feedback to the First Steps Board. Their responses, coded and synthesized by staff at The Lee Institute, provided the key impetus to many of the Board recommendations to follow.

### **Review of First Steps' Programmatic Offerings**

(BOT Chair: Henry Parr – with BOT representation by Linda O'Quinn, Julia Ellen Davis, Sabine Lang and Dr. Floyd Creech)

Summer 2008 also marked the initial meetings of an inter-agency strategic planning subcommittee devoted to reviewing First Steps programmatic offerings. Beginning with a thorough review of the research underlying the agency's funded programs the subcommittee developed – with the assistance of expert working groups – topical recommendations in three areas: Parenting, Child Care Scholarships and Child Care Quality Enhancement and Technical Assistance.

Many of the subcommittee's early recommendations were directly incorporated within First Steps FY10 Program Standards, with additional committee-driven modifications planned for launch during FY11 – along with a collaborative First Steps-DSS pilot project designed to provide scholarship bonuses and intensive technical assistance to centers elevating their ABC Quality Ratings.

Like that of the Regional Summit Participants, the guidance of the programmatic sub-committee was key to the development of the overarching Vision 2013 recommendations to follow. The

committee can be credited, in particular, with the Board's emphasis on the provision of comprehensive, inter-agency service to the state's most vulnerable children. The group's Vision 2013 workplans (adopted by the Board as an Appendix to this report) can be found online amongst the supplemental Vision materials.

### **Review of First Steps' State-Level Policies/Parameters**

(BOT Chair: Judith Aughtry)

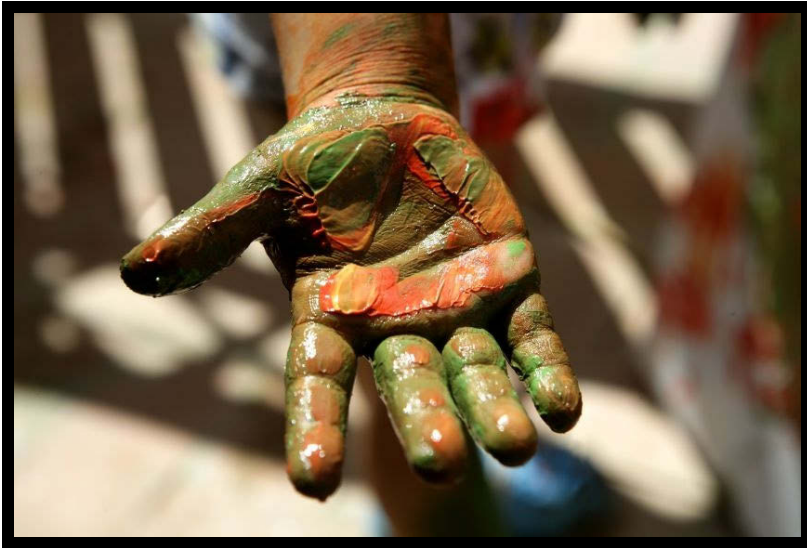
In addition to reviewing the agency's programmatic offerings themselves, a Vision 2013 subcommittee was seated to review the agency's legal mandates, structure and policies. After completing their initial review, this group devoted the bulk of its time to developing its key recommendation: a performance-based Partnership funding pilot to be launched in 2010.

The sub-committee has particularly benefited from the participation of local Executive Directors, who have helped to develop and refine initial drafts of the proposed First Steps Exemplary Performance Recognitions (EPRs), scheduled for more extensive stakeholder review during between January and March 2010.

### **Feedback and Synthesis**

The findings from each of the three major process strands have been subjected to multiple rounds of iterative (and in some cases ongoing) stakeholder review – with multiple feedback opportunities provided for local board members, executive directors, summit participants and SC First Steps' staff and trustees. Now incorporating the feedback of well over 900 S.C.

stakeholders, the Board's final Vision 2013 recommendations have been meaningfully - and substantially - informed by local and inter-agency participants.



### **Key Assumptions**

The recommendations and strategies to follow are premised upon four key assumptions. In order to place these findings in context, a brief description of each is included below.

#### **1. School readiness is contextual and most meaningfully measured using population-level indicators and outcomes.**

Though First Steps is, perhaps, held to the nation's most stringent early childhood accountability language, both the

initiative and profession have struggled to define (and measure) "school readiness" succinctly and appropriately.

While First Steps has made significant strides in its efforts to measure both intermediate readiness outcomes and program quality within its funded strategies, ultimately these efforts - while required to meet the evaluation demands of the First Steps enabling legislation - are not sufficient in and of themselves to ensure the long-term success of South Carolina's children, nor the effectiveness of the state's public investments in young children and their families.

Ultimately school readiness is contextual. South Carolina's children are "ready for school" when and if they enter the state's schools and experience the type of early success that will propel them to long-term achievement.

With this in mind, the Vision 2013 recommendations are premised on the need to expand First Steps' focus beyond its own internal program outcomes and toward an increased focus on:

- "Leading" (or predictive) indicators of school readiness in South Carolina, to include population-level indicators closely linked with early school success/failure.
- "Trailing" (or reflective) indicators of school readiness in South Carolina, to include primary grade retention rates and third grade achievement on the state's new Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS).

#### **2. A population-level readiness focus will require both the development of resources and increased systemic coordination.**

While First Steps has wisely focused its recent efforts on measuring the outcomes associated with its own funded investments, First Steps does not – and will never – possess sufficient resources to single-handedly transform the educational and life outcomes of South Carolina’s young children.



Accordingly, First Steps’ focus on population level indicators and outcomes, will require both the development of new public and private resources and a vigorously renewed focus on the state and local boards’ roles as coordinating and leadership boards where the state’s child serving agencies, organizations, parents and private service providers can come together to ensure the optimal and coordinated use of our state’s limited resources.

**3. Given limited resources, the state’s school readiness efforts must be aggressively focused on those children most likely to experience early school failure:** First Steps is widely recognized for its efforts to target “the poorest of the poor and neediest of the needy” (High/Scope, 2006) – with the overwhelming

majority of its individual clients meeting one or more South Carolina -validated readiness risk factors.

Despite this noteworthy success, both research and the limited scope of First Steps’ own programs and resources suggests a need to identify the state’s most high-risk children (those exposed to multiple, compounded readiness risk factors) and address their needs early and comprehensively.

**South Carolina data suggests strongly that it is these children for whom school readiness deficits are most clearly defined.**

A January 2007 analysis by Dr. Baron Holmes of the SC Budget and Control Board explored the attributes of South Carolina children experiencing school failure by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (those children scoring in the Below-Basic category of the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test or who had been retained at least once). Dr. Holmes findings suggest that a handful of predisposing risk factors are associated with particularly high rates of failure.

Risk Factor	Percentage Failing by 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	SC Children (Birth – 6) Possessing Risk Factor
Abuse, Neglect, Foster Care	53%	3% (10,171)
Very Low Birth Weight (<3.3 lbs)	52%	2.11% (7,170)
Low Maternal Education (< 12 <sup>th</sup> )	48%	24.1% (81,852)
T.A.N.F. (50% Federal Poverty)	45%	8.4% (28,690)
Low Birth Weight (3.3-4.4 lbs)	43%	2.77% (9,390)
Teen Mother (<18)	43%	4.6% (15,618)
Food Stamps (130% Federal Poverty)	42%	20% (67,897)
Teenage Mother (18- 20)	37%	8.83% (29,946)
Low Birth Weight (4.4-5.5lbs)	36%	5.53% (18,780)

In a 2009 analysis conducted as part of the state's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant, the success of children in three, high-risk categories (children with disabilities, children born to mothers with less than a high school diploma and those with emotional-behavioral problems) was examined at both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades.

Risk Factor	% of Cohort	% Below Standards		% Far Below Standards	
		3rd	5th	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5th
Any disability	17%	46%	51%	24%	33%
Mother with less than high school	24%	39%	50%	21%	28%
Emotional-behavioral problems	15%	47%	57%	27%	35%
None of the above	59%	14%	22%	6%	9%

Finally, in an effort to explore the effects of compounding these risk factors, negative outcomes were associated with the possession of more than one of these factors.

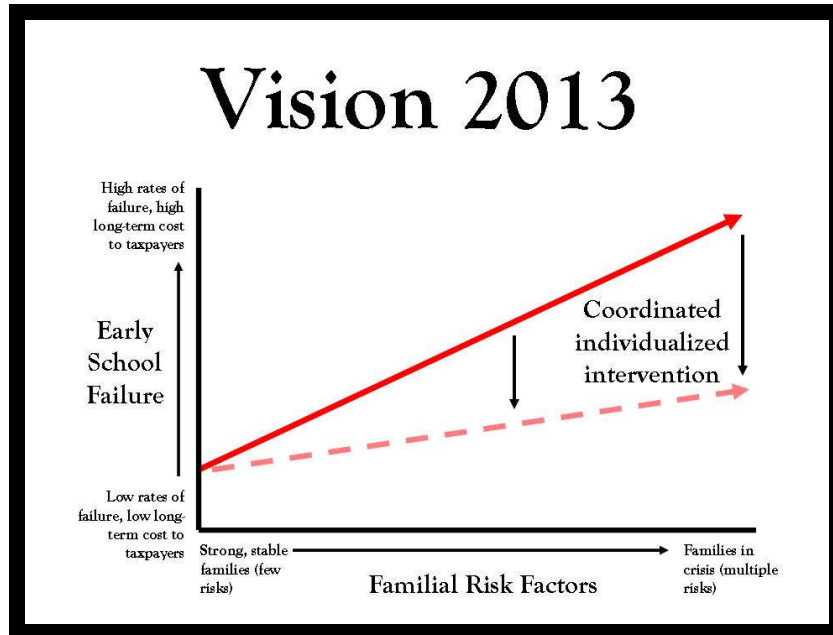
Number of Risk Factors	% of Cohort	% Below Standards		% Far Below Standards	
		3rd	5th	3rd	5th
None of the 3 risk factors	59%	14%	22%	6%	9%
Only 1 of the 3 risk factors	31%	32%	42%	16%	22%
Any 2 of the 3 risk factors	9%	55%	64%	32%	42%
All of the 3 risk factors	1.4%	69%	81%	45%	62%

**4. Addressing the comprehensive needs of the state's high-risk children is an individualized affair, requiring a need to "begin from the child and not from the program":** Though First Steps has enabled the high-quality interventions for nearly a decade; effectively meeting the comprehensive, individual readiness needs of the state's high-risk children (thus improving their often costly and negative educational and developmental trajectories) may require new service delivery approaches..

Several of the recommendations which follow suggest one approach: providing comprehensive services to children and families, according to individualized (client-level) readiness plans. Reminiscent of the state's current approach to service delivery under I.D.E.A. Part C (BabyNet), this approach would entail both service coordination (assessing the individual child and family needs of priority First Steps clients and linking them to available services within their communities) and targeted service provision (using First Steps' own resources to fill service gaps according to individual need).

**The Vision: Connect South Carolina's high-risk children to coordinated, individualized interventions designed to improve their educational and developmental trajectories.**





## Vision 2013: Themes, Recommendations and Strategies

With these key assumptions undergirding each, the First Steps Board of Trustees presents the following recommendations and strategies, designed to carry the initiative into its next phase. Consistent with the initiative's legislative mandates, these recommendations are considered within the context of three overarching Vision themes:

A. Support and strengthen South Carolina's targeted school readiness interventions

B. Maximize the state's child-focused resources and optimize their associated structural supports

C. Support readiness-focused public policy efforts across South Carolina

### **THEME A: SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN SOUTH CAROLINA'S TARGETED SCHOOL READINESS INTERVENTIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION A1.** Recognizing the high costs and diminished outcomes associated with exposure to compounded readiness risk factors, develop methods to provide coordinated, individualized interventions to the state's most high-risk children.

This single recommendation so fundamentally shapes the committee's findings that it is proposed as the definition of the Board's "Vision 2013" itself: *"Connect South Carolina's high-risk children to coordinated, individualized interventions designed to improve their educational and developmental trajectories."*

Echoing broad and consistent stakeholder feedback from:

Regional Summit Participants (August-September 2008): who not only echoed the need to focus on individual, local and regional needs, but were described by process

facilitators at The Lee Institute as generally understanding “that the magnitude of change they are working toward on behalf of individual families and for the community at large is beyond what any one agency can accomplish...” and expressing their belief that “a comprehensive approach to working with families works;” and

Executive Directors (October 2008): who consistently noted that “one size fits all” and “cookie cutter” approaches should be eschewed by the Board in favor of “holistic approaches designed to meet unique family needs” and measuring programmatic results according to “how well risk factors are addressed”; and

Board Chairs (August 2009): who advised of the need to “focus on the unique needs of individual families”; and

The Board’s Program Strategic Planning Sub-committee (September 2009): who strongly emphasized the research basis behind the provision of coordinated, comprehensive service as a superior means of producing outcomes;

The Board’s proposal of services “through the lens of a child” provides an individualized approach designed to equip high-risk children with the private and/or inter-agency supports needed to meet their unique individual and familial needs. In doing so, it is the Board’s hope not only to produce short-term programmatic gains, but to permanently alter the developmental and educational trajectories of high-risk children.

**Strategy A1a.** Work with selected First Steps County Partnerships to pilot the Board’s proposed “individualized readiness plan” methodology. Consider the use of BabyNet’s individualized service model as a model framework through which to link priority First Steps clients to comprehensive supports to include contracted services as necessary, with First Steps serving as a public “payor of last resort.” (e.g. Prioritize linkages to other public/community services, use First Steps funds to procure supports unavailable via alternate means.)

**Strategy A1b.** Refocus the First Steps program standards for FY11 around providing integrated services to high-risk clients (those possessing multiple readiness risk factors). Require county-level planning designed to ensure the early identification of these clients and additional standards involving systematic referrals on the basis of individual need, and the gradual integration of certain funded strategies.

While the above recommendations hold the potential to significantly reshape the “look” of First Steps’ own service delivery model over the coming years, the Board must simultaneously continue its efforts to strengthen programmatic accountability and leverage systemic change by tying enhanced requirements to the receipt of First Steps funds, focusing on research-based interventions and establishing ever-strengthened program models, which allow for local flexibility while ensuring uniform quality of implementation as a result of standardized requirements, central training, and strengthened monitoring.

(See the related recommendations of the Program Strategic Planning Subcommittee online.)



**RECOMMENDATION A2.** Expand the availability of affordable, high-quality child care for high-risk children across South Carolina.

While the Board's vision is largely premised upon the notion of connecting high-risk children to the individualized supports needed to improve their developmental and educational trajectories, the need for one intervention – access to affordable, high-quality child care – may be required by so many SC families as to make it a priority in and of itself.

Though First Steps has made marked progress in this area over its first decade, much work remains - with the necessary improvements likely only when/if the state's regulatory and technical assistance systems work in concert with private service providers to ensure the supports necessary to advance quality within this important industry.

**Strategy A2a.** Work in concert with South Carolina policymakers to create a quality-based incentive system for the state's early education providers, their employees, and customers.

**Strategy A2b.** Continue and expand First Steps efforts to support the state's early education workforce. Incentivize educational advancement and work with the Department of Social Services and General Assembly to modify provider training requirements in ways that will support sequential learning and advanced educational attainment over the collection of disparate "clock hours."

**Strategy A2c.** Pilot the use of supplemental vouchers and/or center bonuses as a method through which to link high risk children to care within the state's best early learning environments.

**Strategy A2d.** Continue to explore synergies between the lead agency for the Child Care Block Grant (SC DSS) and SC First Steps, and build strong work relationships that maximize limited resources in improving and sustaining child care quality.

**RECOMMENDATION A3.** Support programmatic innovations designed to better address the needs of high-risk children.

Though First Steps has made large strides in its efforts to support research-validated early interventions, it has also established itself as a laboratory in which innovative new approaches can grow and bloom.

The flexibility to innovate – within the confines of enhanced accountability requirements – was cited by multiple stakeholder groups, including Regional Summit participants who cited their simultaneous desires to be “flexible, creative, and accountable,” and Executive Directors who spoke of their own concerns that the Board not stifle the emergence “creative new initiatives” – even citing their desire to see incentives directed toward counties willing to create impactful new strategies designed to meet specific community needs.

**Strategy A3a.** Establish additional guidelines around the development and evaluation of non-prevalent strategies in an effort to encourage innovation while ensuring efficacy.

**Strategy A3b.** Explore the feasibility and potential desirability of both limitations on the percentage of overall state funding allocated to non-prevalent strategies (to ensure that the majority of First Steps funding is devoted to well-validated methods) and the allocation of small, supplemental grants designed to encourage innovative approaches to improving client outcomes at both the individual and population levels.

**THEME B:**  
**MAXIMIZE THE STATE’S CHILD-FOCUSED  
RESOURCES AND OPTIMIZE THEIR  
ASSOCIATED STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS**

**RECOMMENDATION B1.** Ensure systemic communication, coordination and collaboration by renewing the state and local boards’ mandates to provide leadership coordination and support to ensure all communities are focused upon – and meeting – the needs of the state’s at-risk children.

In order for South Carolina First Steps to fulfill both these Vision 2013 goals and its own legislative mandate to serve as the state’s interagency leadership board for young children~providing venues at both the state and local levels for child serving agencies, organizations, parents and private service providers to ensure the optimal and coordinated use limited resources – it must work more aggressively to communicate, coordinate and collaborate with partner agencies and other key stakeholders.

This mandate, outlined broadly in the First Steps enabling legislation, takes on new significance in light of the Board’s recent recognition as South Carolina’s Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), First Steps’ designation as lead agency of the inter-agency BabyNet system, and the Board’s current proposals to explore service coordination models based – in large part – on linking high-risk clients to the services of partner agencies.

**Strategy B1a.** Reinvigorate the roles of partner agencies at the state and local board levels by convening regular agency forums, focused opportunities for coordination and collaboration.

**Strategy B1b.** Incorporate regular partner agency highlights into state and local board meetings.

**Strategy B1c.** Pursue the incorporation of additional collaboration criteria within the First Steps program standards, annual reporting process and into performance-based funding criteria.

**Strategy B1d.** Pursue, as the state's newly-named ECAC, the creation on an inter-agency "Children's Budget" for South Carolina (beginning in FY11, as feasible).

**RECOMMENDATION B2. Strengthen and expand First Steps' outcomes-based accountability focus; incorporate performance-based funding.**

Among the common recommendations of Vision 2013 stakeholder groups were several relating to outcomes-based accountability and performance-based funding. For example:

*Regional Summit Participants (August-September 2008):* Recommended the need for "flexible, creative and accountable partnerships in communities, especially in a tight fiscal environment, in order to serve families in a way that will produce measurable and lasting positive change."

*Executive Directors (October 2008):* Likewise proposed incentives linked to "collaboration and proven results"; while the

*Board Chairs (August 2009):* urged a continued focus upon "outcomes-based accountability," recommending not only the prospect of performance-based Partnership funding but the possibility of linking this to community and inter-agency collaboration.

Though the Board has made great strides in these areas, linking renewal to strategy-level performance beginning in FY09 and developing performance-based funding-criteria for use during FY10 (with plans to devote at least 10% of Partnership funding to this purpose during the coming fiscal year), several strategies designed to strengthen this focus are recommended.

**Strategy B2a.** Continue and advance First Steps recent efforts to ensure outcomes-based accountability through a data-driven annual renewal process. Explore the use of community-level indicators as one means of outcome measurement.

**Strategy B2b.** Expand the agency's use of performance-based Partnership funding as a means through which to leverage quality, accountability, collaboration and leadership at the local level and to encourage strong local implementation of statewide strategic priorities.





**RECOMMENDATION B3. Strengthen internal capacity on a statewide basis.**

It is clear that First Steps' state and local effectiveness ultimately hinges on its systemic capacity to administer funds and implement its mandates both optimally and accountably. During the agency's recent Board-to-Board meeting new chairs, in particular, were vocal about the state's need to provide additional support and technical assistance to local boards and Partnership directors/staff – with chairs generally citing the need for additional learning and more frequent opportunities for direct communication.

**Strategy B3a.** Increase Board-to-Board dialogue and communication with and among local board leaders.

**Strategy B3b.** Increase and standardize local board training opportunities – particularly those aimed at new partnership board members. Explore the creation of a mentoring program for new board chairs.

**Strategy B3c.** Create standardized processes for conducting comprehensive, local needs/resource assessments and multi-year strategic planning/renewal documents – along with tools designed to support local boards in implementing Vision 2013 recommendations and strategies.

**Strategy B3d.** Establish operational, collaboration, and/or partnership board standards to accompany First Steps' program standards. Increase monitoring efforts to ensure effectiveness.

**RECOMMENDATION B4. Maximize First Steps own resources through the ongoing pursuit of internal, structural improvements and regional/inter-agency collaboration.**

During this period of rapidly diminishing revenue it is more important than ever that the Board take steps to ensure the maximized use of all First Steps resources, exploring innovative methods through which to meet the agency's strategic goals (at both the state and local levels) while maximizing the percentage of funding devoted to direct client service.

**Strategy 8a.** Incentivize regional and/or cross-agency staffing and organizational structures to minimize administrative expenses. Seek to reduce fixed costs like

rent, contracts, through inter-agency partnership agreements, etc.

**Strategy 8b.** Maximize First Steps’ statewide investments through the introduction of new partnership-to-partnership “in-kind support” requirements.

**Strategy 8c.** Reexamine the agency’s approach to capturing partnership and state-level “overhead” to ensure rigorous compliance with the agency’s enabling legislation – ensuring both its agency-wide minimization and appropriate and consistent depiction.



### **THEME C:** **SUPPORT READINESS-FOCUSED PUBLIC POLICY EFFORTS ACROSS SOUTH CAROLINA**

**RECOMMENDATION C1.** Develop aggressive advocacy and resource development strategies designed to support the needs of high-risk children at both the state and local levels.

Of all the stakeholder messages communicated during the Vision 2013 process, one of the strongest and most consistent was this: Stakeholders are counting on the Board and the SCFS staff to serve as their “voice” – advocating broadly for the needs of young children, disseminating key research and programmatic guidance and assisting in the development of resources, both with South Carolina policy makers and amongst private and philanthropic partners.

**Strategy C1a.** Use First Steps’ structure and dollars as a means to draw and leverage additional investments in SC children and families – to include the creation of a South Carolina School Readiness Endowment. Assist stakeholders in understanding the exponential effects of First Steps funding.

**Strategy C1b.** Develop a focused resource development strategy for the initiative, incorporating grant writing, private fundraising, and other means of resource development.

*Strategy C1c.* Explore opportunities to blend/braid public funding (across agencies) and increase focus on quality child care - maximizing private sector investments.

**RECOMMENDATION C2.** Create a state-level readiness measure (using indicators of early school success) through which to assess the impact of South Carolina's collective investment in young children.

*Strategy C2a.* Work to develop a statistical, policy-level measure of readiness in South Carolina, incorporating both "leading" (or predictive) and "trailing" (or reflective) indicators. Use this index to expand the state's and Board's view of First Steps' systemic effectiveness, by focusing on real-world readiness outcomes in addition to the agency's internal program measures.

**The South Carolina First Steps  
Board of Trustees  
December 2009**

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For more information and additional supporting documents, visit the Vision 2013 website at: <http://www.scfirststeps.org/vision2013.html>

